



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
KRISTEN DEXTER

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

68TH DISTRICT

**Testimony from Representative Kristen Dexter
February 24, 2010**

**Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
In Support of Senate Bill 427**

Chairwoman Berceau, Committee members, thank you for convening today to hold this hearing on Senate Bill 427.

The need for this legislation was brought to my attention from the director of the Chippewa County Housing Authority. This is not a direct agency of county government but a quasi-government agency charged with implementing state and federal housing assistance and related programs.

Due to the small pool of employees at the Housing Authority the employees' health care costs continue to rise. In an effort to address these rising costs the Director went to the county to see if, as a quasi-county agency, they could pool with the county's health insurance plan. There would be no cost to the county other than to allow the housing authority to enter into their larger plan. The Chippewa County Housing Authority, for example, already joins with the county to provide workers compensation insurance.

Under current law, a county with more than 100 employees may use a self-insured program to provide health insurance to its employees and can join with other units of government like cities, villages, towns and even other counties to provide such coverage and save costs by increasing the size of their purchasing pool. However, a county housing authority under the law is technically a separate entity from the county itself and therefore the housing authority's request was denied... not because of any additional cost or burden, but simply because state law does not explicitly allow quasi-government agencies to also join in such purchasing pools. I believe this legislation is a basic adjustment to state statute language and could provide much needed flexibility for these agencies that are struggling to stay within their budgets.

So to recap, this bill would merely allow a county housing authority to join with the county in providing health insurance to its employees. With skyrocketing costs of health care it seems we should be encouraging larger pools to share the risk of health insurance rather than limiting an obvious partner with our county governments.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to have your support on this legislation.